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ABSTRACT

Reading instruction for the college student learning a second language should begin by establishing symbol-sound-meaning association. The step from speech to reading could best be made at the structural level. The emphasis at this point should be on sentence structure and the student should be taught to develop the ability to interpret the complexity of the thought processes as expressed in simple, compound, and complex sentences. Situational rather than linguistic grading should be emphasized, that is, it is necessary to describe the learner's experience. Writing, thus, becomes another method of communication. The student must also control pronunciation, intonation, and rhythmic features to develop his ability to read with appropriate speed and comprehension. Rather than learning vocabulary, the student must learn intonation, function order in sentence patterns, structure words, and word-form changes. Once the student has been trained up to the sentence level, the next steps can lead him to developing critical reading skills.
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Problems in Reading and Linguistic Explanations for Them

0. The present paper deals with problems encountered in reading by students at a certain level of education and the possible explanations to these problems provided by the discipline of Linguistics. The contribution of Linguistics to the specific skill of reading as a part of the integrated language skills has been debated right from Bloomfield's time, while the general debate about the reading process and reading readiness is much older in age. The present paper only deals with some of the problem areas in reading, not the total field of reading itself; the second restriction on the paper comes from the science of linguistics in relation to the reading skills, thus ruling out of consideration problems like the physiological, psychological and neurological aspects of difficulties encountered by a reader.

1. Problems in reading are directly related to three factors: the reader - the book or what the reader reads - and, the reading process, how he reads. It is essential to define these three factors for a clearer discussion of the subject.

1.1 The Reader: The reader in the present paper is a foreign student in an American University who has had instruction in the English Language skills at the undergraduate level in his own country. He tackles his reading assignments at the university level with the inherent difficulties of a second

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language learner with all the linguistics and cultural differences in his way. The motivational aspect of the problem is assumed, for the simple reason that he has sought admission in an American university far away from his home country is indicative of his attitude to learning.

1.2 The Content, or what he reads: The reader here is a generalized term which refers to any student studying either in Humanities, Social Sciences or Sciences. Most of his reading material is in the form of text-books on the subject, reference books on the subject, various periodicals and journals, newspaper and other readings for enjoyment. The last could be called as light reading material used by the reader for relaxation.

The Content also refers to the language in which it is printed, in this case the English language. This brings us to an awareness of his different linguistic background insofar as he has some other language as his first language. He has certain problems in the second language as he does not possess an efficient control of the structure of the second language. This may also include the difference between spellings and sounds in English as contrasted with his own language script which may be regularly phonemic or may show other characteristics different from English.

Related with the content choice is the problem of purpose: why will the reader choose a particular book, periodical or journal? It may be to seek information on his subject of study, or to find the line of thought expressed in a particular book, or to compare that particular line of thought with the reader's own thinking, or to relate the former to the relevance of arguments

to the overall pattern of the subject. The varying nature of aims will change not only the content of the reading, also the reading process adopted by the reader. Foreign students in American universities are heavy losers on this point; most of them find the burden of assignments per week too big to cover. On an average, a student is expected to read four to five hundred pages of printed text. However in most cases, the purpose of such reading assignments is to help the student to acquaint himself with the overall view of the subject under discussion; the student takes it to an intensive reading assignment. This difference in understanding the teacher's intent is partly due to the different views about the concept of an educational assignment in different cultures. Most Asians react to all assignments with utmost seriousness, for that is usually the end product in their system. A student asked to read certain portions of the text would take it as mastering the text, rather than being aware of the general line of argument.

2. The Reading Process: The problem of the reading process has been discussed in this paper in terms of the student's efficiency in reading in his native language, the process involved in reading a second language, i.e., English. This would deal with the recognition of symbols with sounds and then associating these sounds with meanings, reading by sentences rather than words, and finally by paragraphs with the overall organizational pattern of the paragraph in the printed text. This requires an efficient control of the second language structure which can enable the

student to predict what will come ahead in the printed text, in terms of the development of the thought process and linguistic structure in the printed text.

It is in the context of the reader, the reading content, and the reading process that various problems are posed and the possible linguistic explanations offered. The discussion about the semantic patterns in a particular language has not been included in this paper, for the obvious reason that there is not sufficient work on this aspect of the problem which however, is an important aspect of the successful reading. Finally, a reading program based on the linguistic explanations offered in this paper has been suggested.

3.1 The kind of reading content that the student is asked to tackle can determine to a great extent his ability and performance. The field of study determines his initial reaction to the book; if it is the subject that he knows well, he is likely to start with an initial advantage; or if it is the subject that he is interested in knowing more, his initial motivation would be very high, and thus conducive to a successful performance. The student will find it easier if the author has set out the general plan of the work in the Preface or the introductory portion of the book. This can give the student an adequate idea about what he can expect from the text, and what he does not need to read. Or, if the index lists all the major concepts in that subject and refers to the pages on which these concepts have been discussed, it can help the student a great deal in concentrating on those concepts. All these points, however, relate to the organization of the printed text.

The relationship of the thought processes discussed and the kind of language used poses the first obstacle. The author may plan to go very deep into the subject and yet may not have clear division of the thought process into well-defined units building up to his conclusion; or, the author may not consistently follow the point of making a point and then offering examples for the same or the other way whereby he states the examples first and then makes the point. A consistent pattern will help the student to master the main points and the supporting examples. An explicit statement about the point covered in the chapter of the book either in the very first paragraph or in the end as summary of that chapter is again helpful.

An easy, yet very important, point to start with an inefficient reader in a second language program is to find out if he possesses an efficient control in his first language. This can either be found out by administering a reading test based on the first language of the reader. This test should concentrate on determining the vocabulary level of the student in his first language, his ability to associate symbol-sound-meaning relationship, to read the assignment in sentences and then in paragraphs with simultaneous interpretation of the content. Some students learn reading by reading aloud, some by silent reading, both, however, associating symbol-sound-meaning relationship. Loud reading can help the student to concentrate on the subject or be gradually get used to subvocalization in reading even at the advanced level. If the student is already efficient in establishing symbol-sound-meaning relationship in his first language, he comes well-prepared to attack the second language text. Moreover, the association of

reading in the first language with the experiences in that culture will help the student associate the content learnt with real life experiences. This can help us to assume that the student will have a positive tendency to associate the content learnt with the experiences in his subject or the second culture. This would require that all reading in the second language should be based on experiences in the second culture. The new foreign students in an American University should thus have reading assignments on the Academic procedures in an American university, the food habits, the postal system, the dating system, developing friendship with the American students, shopping practices, and other such common experiences in daily life. This will help the student gain a reasonable efficiency in the spoken language. Research has shown positive correlation between efficiency in the speech habits and reading habits.

The problem of establishing symbol-sound-meaning association is not very difficult for the college student, for he has already had some training in the language for a certain number of years. If the student can be helped to gain proficiency in speech habits, the next jump is from speech to reading. Carl Lefevre suggests that the jump can most easily be made at the level of structuring. The student should be helped to gain an ability in interpreting the complexity of the thought processes as expressed in simple sentences and compound or complex sentences. He must also be made aware of certain words which tend to reverse or largely modify the meaning of the whole sentence or at times the paragraph itself: words like, however, on the contrary, nevertheless, etc. The student must also be helped to gain an efficient control of the grammar through which they can describe the structure of sentences. Thus, the emphasis at this

stage is heavily on the sentence method. It could be further modified by insistence on situational grading rather than linguistic grading. Linguistic grading deals with the way words join together to form meaningful sentences, an extension of the phonic approach. However, situational grading implies the necessity of describing the learner's experiences. Writing thus becomes another method of communication and gets closely related to speech. Carl Lefevre refers to this point and offers the following agrument:

> ---the child's early generalizations about sound and structure are unconcious, and that his prime motivation for making such generalizations is awareness of similarities and differences of meaning.

The scheme of situational grading, besides making the reader aware of the real life experiences, has the advantage of introducing structures. The ultimate success in developing the learner's ability to read with appropriate speed and comprehension depends very much on his control of the pronunciation, intonation and rhythmic features which the native speaker of English already commands when he begins the task of learning to read the language in the primary grades. This facility also enables the native speaker to predict what comes ahead in the chapter, for his awareness of the intonation and rhythmic features coupled with an understanding of the line of thought development gives him this facility. Reading to a great extent is anticipating the writer's thought development correctly. The second language reader at times lacks this facility, for he is given to translating the second language to the first language before getting at the

semantic pattern of the chapter. Whenever his prediction goes wrong, he has to go back and correct himself. This has a great effect on his speed and comprehension.

Reader's familiarity with the structural scheme of language in practical terms is thus very essential to a successful reading at the college level. The insistence on situational grading with the introduction of intonation and rhythmic features of the language also includes the gradual introduction of higher vocabulary levels. After from a basic vocabulary, it is of great importance that the reader have an active control of vocabulary much used in his subject of study. Linguistic research has established the extent of basic vocabulary in terms of the functor words and the content words, and most books are written with a certain vocabulary level in mind.

The linguistic and paralinguistic features tend to get merged when we talk of intonational patterns that differentiate larger utterances in English: these may be statements, questions, requests, or meant ironically while the reader may take them as flat sentences meaning what the print says. Such sentence-understanding requires a great deal of integrated interpretation of the whole paragraph, at times the whole chapter or the article under consideration. There may also be subpatterns of intonation that delineate lesser elements within larger structures. While the main features of intonation at the sentence are pitch, stress and juncture; the first two patterns also differentiate lesser syntactical features. The native speaker has learnt these patterns by movements from intonation to phonemes, phonemes to intonation, back and forth. He has learned all the sentence patterns, their obligatory intonation patterns and word

order, a good deal of functional grammar, including the system of word-form changes, and a vocabulary of more than five thousand words. The second language speaker has, however, not acquired such a control. All these points need to be built in him as his control of the language with a view to enabling him to achieve perform in his reading assignments. Carl Lefevre refers to this in the following paragraph:

> ---(1)intonation, (2) function order in sentence patterns, (3) structure words, and (4) word form changes are of greater significance than individual words in American English. These four signalling systems serve in about that order of significance in the language system as a whole. Since words occur in groups within larger structural and meaning-bearing patterns, according to the workings of an intermeshing system, our teaching of reading should stress larger patterns than the single word even when teaching individual words. It remains to be established precisely how much analysis of sound-letter relationships within words is required in reading and in reading instruction, or in composition, for that matter. The patternless reading of many pupils at all levels suggests that we have paid too much attention to the alphabetical principle, and to words singled out of their normal structures. This is one fatal flaw in most phonics methods, another is unsound and false information about sound-spelling relationships.

While the main burden of the argument in the preceding excerpt lies in refuting the validity of the phonics approach and a possible application of the sentence approach, the second language speaker needs to gain this efficiency at the sentence level before jumping up to the paragraph and the chapter level. A concious attempt at finding organization in the sentence, in the paragraph and finally in the chapter itself is really the aim of the reader. The notion of paragraph patterns as an essential mechanism in better reading skill is yet to be worked out in linguistic terms. However, it is obvious if the student can be enabled to gain the "paragraph sense," by a conscious analysis of the paragraph in terms of progressively built up ideas expressed in

individual sentences, the comprehension is bound to be clearer and faster. A study in this kind of a sentence analysis within the paragraph may help the student find the interrelationships between the sentences forming one unit, called the paragraph, which ultimately can be built up to the paragraph analysis within the chapter.

The problem of faster reading matched with faster comprehension of the material presented can be dealt with at two levels: training the eye movements in such a way that there is continuously decreasing number of eye fixations on the reading material. The linguistic principle behind this kind of a training lies in the gradual progression by the student to read from an individual word to the sentence and at times more than a sentence at a time. This usually starts with the progressive-regressive-progressive movement of the eyes from left to the right, but cover-card training or loop-training makes it easier for the student to read in structures either within the sentence or within the paragraph. This forces the student to keep pace with the fast moving or fast disappearing material.

Research studies have indicated a positive correlation between the grade point average and the reading speed couple with comprehension. On the average an undergraduate student needs to have a reading speed somewhere between the range of 550 to 650 words a minute with 90% comprehension. It thus becomes essential for the foreign student to acquire skills which could enable him to raise his reading speed. A linguistically-oriented program for such purpose would need to have the following considerations:

1. word reading with the help of cover cards or loops, the ultimate aim being decoding the print with the simultaneous association of the

print with the spoken form.
2. phrase reading with the help of the cover card or loops with the ultimate aim being training eye movements in such a way that eye fixations are reduced in the reading process;
3. sentence reading by cover card or loops, the ultimate aim being decoding the whole sentence as a unit of utterance; and; leading up to reading of mere important elements within the sentence;
4. training in predictability of the material by an understanding of the nature of the material, the general trend of thought development and language structure;
5. developing critical reading skills concentrating on information, analysis, comparison or integration both by reading and practice techniques;
6. meaning-finding practice by exposing the students to reading material which contains the main essence of the unit either in the beginning, or in the middle, or in the end; the ultimate aim being to help the student to grasp the essential portions of the text and leave out the redundant portions;

A detailed program of reading which starts with the decoding of the print in terms of establishing symbol-sound—meaning associations will help the foreign student gain a great deal of proficiency in distinguishing between words, phrases and sentences. Once the student has been trained up to the sentence level, the next steps can lead him to developing critical reading skills.